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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: ALMATY NOTES, APRIL - MAY 2007

¶1. The "Almaty Notes" series is intended to maintain focus on developments in civil society, the media, and the opposition in Kazakhstan's "southern capital" following the move of the Embassy to Astana.

President Meets with Moderate Opposition Leaders

¶2. On April 23 in Almaty, President Nazarbayev met with opposition leaders Alikhan Baymenov and Zharmakhan Tuyakbay. At the meeting with Baymenov they discussed urgent problems of political development of the country, humanitarian and cultural issues including the development of Kazakh language, and patriotic upbringing of the young generation. At the meeting with Tuyakbay they discussed constitutional reforms. According to a National Social-Democratic Party press release, Tuyakbay called the president's attention to violations of the law during the recent formation of Almaty City election commissions. Tuyakbay also reportedly stressed the necessity of a dialogue between the authorities and opposition parties and public organizations. (Interfax, April 23)

Attempt to Picket City Court Disrupted

¶3. On April 19, the mothers and wives of eight "Shanyrak Defenders" kept in detention attempted to picket the Almaty City Court building. The women demanded that their husbands and sons be released and the criminal cases against them be dismissed. The police disrupted the action. Two participants were detained. (Megapolis weekly, April 23)

'Victims' in Abilov's Case did not Appear in Court

¶4. The May 3 hearing of Bulat Abilov's case at the Almalinskiy district court in Almaty was disrupted because the 'victims' in the case failed to appear in the court. (Nachnyem s Ponedelnika weekly, May 4)

Concerns about Overly Intensive Construction in Almaty

¶5. At a meeting with prominent businessmen in Almaty on April 21, President Nazarbayev recommended ending intensive construction in Almaty because the city infrastructure cannot support such development and it is hazardous for the environment. (Vremya daily, April 24)

¶6. On April 24, Prime Minister Masimov directed Almaty Oblast and City akims to terminate land sales in the region until there is a

special order. "It is not a secret that some companies purchase lands at the cadastre [tax assessment] cost and then sell it at market cost," Masimov said. Due to this, Masimov ordered that "all commercial lands in Almaty City and Almaty Oblast should be passed to the 'Zhetysu' special corporation. The money this corporation will earn should be used to develop utility services and infrastructure." (www.gazeta.kz, April 24)

¶7. The Almaty City administration plans to demolish a unique seismic station located in the mountains close to the city. In place of the station the administration intends to build a net of cafes and restaurants. (www.geo.kz, April 24)

NGO Calls on President to Dismiss Almaty City Akim

¶8. Activists of the "Let Us Defend our City" committee held a press conference on April 24 in Almaty to brief journalists about the city administration's refusal to grant them a permit to hold a rally in the center of the city. According to the activists, Almaty City Akim Tasmagambetov has ignored the president's and prime minister's orders to put an end to construction in Almaty. "By doing this, Tasmagambetov creates a dangerous situation in the southern capital," the committee's statement reads. The statement calls on the president to dismiss Akim Tasmagambetov. (www.gazeta.kz, April 24)

State Secretary Met with Ethnic Minority Leaders

¶9. During a visit to Almaty Oblast, State Secretary Oralbay Abdykarimov met with leaders of ethnic minorities to talk about interethnic accord. (Kazakhstan TV channel, April 25)

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Preparations for Maslikhat Elections

¶10. The Central Election Commission has opened the first training center in Almaty for e-voting machine operators. As part of preparations to September elections to Maslikhats, more than half of the city precinct election commissions are slated to be equipped with e-voting machines. (TV Channel-31, April 25)

Aynur Kurmanov will not be arrested

¶11. On April 23 the city court of Almaty rejected a motion filed by the Bostandyk district procurator who asked the court to arrest Aynur Kurmanov for organizing unsanctioned picketing of the "Almatyzher" office on March 30. Kurmanov had been fined for this action, but the procurator found this punishment too light. (www.incar.info, April 23)

MILAS